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Yogini Ekadasi

Yogini Ekadasi occurs during the waning Moon in the month of Ashadha (June/July) and its glories are described in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana. Once Maharaj Yudhisthira enquired from Sri Krsna, "O Supreme Lord! O Madhusudana! You have described the insurmountable glories of Nirjala Ekadasi. Now I very much wish to hear about the Ekadasi that takes place during the waning Moon in the Ashadha month.

The Personality of Godhead svayam-bhagavan Sri Krsna replied, "My dear King, I will detail the Ekadasi that comes in the month of Ashadha and the glorious results its observance brings. This Ekadasi is known to all as Yogini Ekadasi and it destroys all one's most grave sinful reactions. It has the power to deliver one from the ocean of material existence and is all auspicious.

"O best of Kings, Yudhisthira! I will now narrate a story from the Purana to illustrate this sublime truth. Kuvera, the king of Alakapuri is famously devoted to Lord Shiva. Once he had a Yaksa gardener named Hema who was married to Visalakshi. Visalakshi was known throughout the region for her fantastically supercilious beauty; thereupon Hema was most ensnared by his wife's attractiveness. He would regularly gather flowers from the Manasa-sarovara lake and deliver them to Kuvera for his puja to Lord Shankara. One day however, instead of giving them to Kuvera he remained at home, captured in the tight bondage of his wife's love.

"As a result of this, Kuvera did not receive any flowers on that day. Kuvera waited six long hours for Hema to arrive. He was most infuriatingly aggravated since, due to the absence of flowers he was unable to complete his worship of Shiva. Finally after testing his patience to its breaking point Kuvera, the king of the Yakshas bellowed: "Send my messenger to the house of the gardener Hema, find out what the devil he thinks he's playing at!" And with that Kuvera sank into his seat, despondent at the turn of the day's affairs.

"After some time the messenger returned: 'O King Kuvera, Hema the gardener is enjoying the association of his wife in his house.' On hearing this, Kuvera's anger quadrupled in magnitude and he demanded that Hema be brought before him immediately. On coming to his senses Hema Mali grew ashamed and trembling with fear he came before king Kuvera. He offered his respectful obeisances, yet when he rose he was not surprised to find Kuvera's eyes had grown red with anger and his entire body trembled with rage.

"In a voice like burning oil Kuvera said: 'O sinful one! O destroyer of religious principles, you have disregarded my most worshipable Lord Sri Shankara and instead you have engaged in your own sense gratification. So be it, I am cursing you now to suffer from white leprosy. You will henceforth remain separated from your beautiful wife and be always known as a low-class fool. Now, get out of my sight!'

"Being thus cursed by the powerful Kuvera, Hema Mali immediately fell from Alakapuri and was born upon the earth. He became afflicted with white leprosy and suffered immensely miserable conditions. In intense agony he took shelter of a dense and formidable forest. In the gloomy depths of the forest he suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst and at night he could not sleep for fear of wild animals. After wandering through this forest for some time he came at last to the foothills of the Himalayan mountain range. While

moving hither and thither through this region he met with great providence and good fortune the most esteemed and regal sage Markendaya. Feeling very forlorn and downtrodden Hema Mali stood at some distance from the Rsi and offered his obeisances again and again. The kind hearted sage called the poor, afflicted person before him and asked: 'Dear sir, how has the dreadful fate befallen you? What possible sinful, condemnable activities have you performed to warrant such a nasty reaction?

"On hearing this, Hema Mali replied: 'O most kind and munificent sage! I was the gardener of Kuvera, king of the Yakshas. My name is Hema. I used to collect flowers from the Manasa-sarovara lake for the worship of Lord Shiva. One day I was late to give flowers to my master because I was fulfilling my lusty desires instead. Therefore Kuvera became angry and cursed me in this way. I do not know what great fortune has brought me to you, I have heard that the hearts of the saintly personalities are always afflicted by seeing the sufferings of others and they are always engaged in welfare activities. O great sage! With my head in my hands I surrender unto you unequivocally, please be kind and deliver this poor, fallen wretch.

"The sage Markendaya spoke in a compassionate voice like liquid honey. 'O gardener! I will instruct you about a most auspicious and beneficial vow. This vow is known as Yogini Ekadasi and it occurs during the waning Moon of the Ashadha month (June/July.) By the influence of it's piety you will certainly be liberated from the curse you are suffering. On hearing this instruction Hema proceeded to proffer his humble genuflections in the dust at the saints feet again and again, he became joyful and wept tears of sincere gratitude. When the Ekadasi day arrived he observed it in the proper manner by rising early and abstaining from all eating and drinking. By the influence of completing the sacred vow of Ekadasi he regained his divine form and returned to his home in Alakapuri, the abode of Kuvera. He was happily reunited with his wife and humbly took up his gardening service once more.

"O best beloved, the result one obtains by feeding eighty-eight thousand brahmanas is attained by observing this Yogini Ekadasi. This indomitable Ekadasi destroys all one's sinful reactions!